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C O N F I D E N T I A L UNVIE VIENNA 000176

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2019

TAGS: AORC PREL KNNP IAEA SP JA MY SI

SUBJECT: IAEA DG RACE: ECHAVARRI PITCHES FOR U.S. SUPPORT;  
BIN MUSLIM NOT YET IN THE STARTING GATE

REF: STATE 38611

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Geoffrey R. Pyatt, 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) This is an action message. UNVIE proposes USG consider whether or at what juncture officials in Washington should receive Luis Echavarri, candidate for the office of Director General of the IAEA, for an exchange of views about the Agency and an assessment of his potential if Japanese Ambassador Amano's candidacy fails.

¶2. (C) Summary: UNVIE Ambassador Schulte, while in Beijing representing Secretary Chu at the IAEA ministerial meeting on nuclear power, met Luis Echavarri, Director General (DG) of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) and newly-announced Spanish candidate for IAEA DG. Echavarri said to his U.S. interlocutor "my agenda is your agenda" and he assessed that he could win the IAEA DG race as a consensus candidate if the USG were to support him. Malaysia, meanwhile, is reportedly still weighing its potential nomination. End summary.

Assessing His Electability ...

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¶3. (C) Speaking April 21 with Ambassador Schulte in Beijing, IAEA DG nominee Luis Echavarri (Spain) said that his government had not put him forward in the first round of candidates for the IAEA DG post because (1) it was considering with Mexico the candidacy of former President Ernesto Zedillo (whom Spain might have nominated) and (2) a subsequent decision was made to join other EU countries in supporting Japan's IAEA Governor/Ambassador Amano. Now Echavarri and his government assess that Amano's candidacy had passed its peak and that Echavarri could win the votes of many if not all of the first-round supporters of South African IAEA Governor Abdul Minty (were Minty not to re-enter).

¶4. (C) Echavarri was confident that he could secure the votes of Russia, China, and India. He also thought he could secure support from Mexico (which, he said, voted for Amano) and the rest of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) if there were no South American candidates. He thought many developing countries would be attracted to a candidate from Spain (a "moderate" country with good ties to the "South") if, as Echavarri expected, Minty is not

re-nominated and there is no serious candidate from the developing world. Echavarri also thinks he can secure the support of European and other like-minded countries. France, he said, is seriously considering him, despite its strong previous support for Amano. (Note: Echavarri's French, like his English, is excellent. However, French diplomats in Vienna have indicated a strong inclination to stick with Amano. End note.)

¶ 15. (C) If the USG were to support him, Echavarri thinks that he could get 32-33 votes if not a consensus. He intends to run "until the very last minute" and hopes that Japan will decide to withdraw Amano if it becomes clear he cannot win. Echavarri says that his domestic support comes from Spain's nuclear establishment and First VP Maria Theresa Fernandez de la Vega, a personal friend. Echavarri claims political support from left and right in Spain, having served both camps as Spain's nuclear regulator.

... and Qualifications

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¶ 16. (C) Echavarri told Ambassador Schulte "my agenda is your (U.S.) agenda" including effective safeguards verification, universalization of the Additional Protocol as a safeguards standard, preventing the spread of enrichment and reprocessing capabilities (ENR), and good management of the Agency. He said his home country provides a good example of a country with nuclear power without ENR (unlike Japan). Echavarri added that he understands the technical role and mandate of the IAEA. While the DG must understand the political context of the Agency's agenda, he opined, his

reporting and recommendations to the Board must be technically-based and sound. The staff should be apolitical. In a reference to the current incumbent Echavarri said if the DG goes to Davos "he should talk about the IAEA, not world peace."

¶ 17. (C) Echavarri claims good management skills and experience in various sectors: private (Westinghouse); government (Spain's nuclear regulator); international (12 years at NEA). He notes he has probably managed larger staffs and organizations than any other candidates for IAEA DG. He thinks that the IAEA has an abundance of staff and structures that should be streamlined at the same time any additional funding is applied to expand and reinforce priority program activities. He supports a DG term limit and would intend to serve no more than two terms (which would bring him to the age of 68). Finally, Echavarri said he would not promise Deputy Director General (DDG) posts to any country but would always want a U.S. national among his DDGs; the U.S. could retain the management post or have another (e.g., safety and security) if we prefer.

Late Entrant Needs Game-Changing Events

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¶ 18. (C) Echavarri observed that USG support would be critical for his electability and asked for meetings with "the right people" in Washington as soon as possible. He knows that we support Amano but hopes that we might back him instead as a consensus candidate. "Two thirds is not enough" to serve as a consensus-builder at the IAEA, he argues. Echavarri intends to travel to Board capitals and to Vienna for meetings with Board member states and regional groups. He said his country would not offer expense-paid trips like Japan or South Africa did in their campaigns.

¶ 19. (C) Echavarri argued it would be "unfair" to schedule the next Special Board for voting on DG candidates prior to the June 15-19 Board meeting, as it would give him little time to campaign. He assumes that the Board will need to meet in July on the budget and proposes to schedule the vote at that time, preceded by straw polls in late June.

Still Three and Counting

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¶10. (C) In a separate conversation in Vienna, Malaysian Ambassador Manzoor Hussain asserted to Charge that the GOM was still weighing a formal nomination of former IAEA DDG Noramly bin Muslim and would make its decision by deadline day, April 27, in light of what other formal nominations have been made by then. After denying his government had backed off a candidacy, however, the Malaysian speculated about the other candidates and predicted a two-way race between Echavarri and Amano. He reflected the conventional wisdom here in dismissing Slovenian candidate Petric as well as the (as yet undeclared) Chilean Ambassador Skoknic.

Too Early to Call

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¶11. (C) Comment: Although Echavarri has occasionally represented the NEA at IAEA Board meetings, he is, unlike the other declared candidates, a largely unknown quantity among Vienna delegations. Echavarri's presentation and interventions at the Beijing ministerial meeting were effective in explaining highly technical subjects to policy makers. However, with the field still open, it is too early to assess whether Echavarri could play the bridging role that he claims. And Japan, for now, shows no inclination of suspending its deep-pocketed campaign for Amano. Mission has conveyed to Amano the U.S. offer for a visit to Washington in early May (reftel). In the meantime, however, we are alert to Echavarri's potential role as a fall-back candidate if Amano is unable to secure the necessary 24 votes. With this in mind, Mission recommends favorable consideration of Echavarri's proposal to visit Washington, which might best be scheduled after Amano's visit. End Comment.

PYATT